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TAGS: [PREL](#), [PARM](#), [PTER](#), [MARR](#), [EFIN](#), [KISL](#), [KNNP](#), [BA](#), [IR](#), [IZ](#), [BILAT](#), [OFFICIALS](#), [REGION](#)

SUBJECT: COUNSELOR ZELIKOW DISCUSSES IRAN AND IRAQ WITH
SHURA COUNCIL MEMBERS

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: State Department Counselor Zelikow met March 12 with Shura Council members Dr. Khalid Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and Ibrahim Mohamed Bashmi, both of whom are on the Foreign Affairs, Defense, and National Security Committee, to discuss Iraq, Iran and domestic issues in Bahrain. Dr. Khalid said that the U.S. needs to make more of an effort to involve Iraqi tribes along the border with Iran in the political process and in border security. The new Iraqi army and police need to be seen as diverse and representative of all Iraqis. He does not think southern Shia naturally look to Iran as the leader of global Shiism, but Iraqi and Iranian clerics may both vie for the loyalty of Iraqi Shia. End Summary.

2. (C) In a March 12 meeting with Shura Council members Dr. Khalid Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, head of the Foreign Affairs, Defense, and National Security Committee, and Ibrahim Mohamed Bashmi, a member of the same committee, Counselor Zelikow inquired about the security situation in the region. Centcom J5 Director Rear Admiral Moeller and the Ambassador accompanied the Counselor. Dr. Khalid outlined Iraq, Iran, and Bahrain's domestic security situation as the top three security concerns for Bahrain. Bashmi added that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the root security problem that contributes to all other regional issues, saying that if this problem were resolved, the whole relationship between the U.S. and the Arab world would change and help resolve other issues.

Iraq's challenges from a historian's perspective...

3. (C) Dr. Khalid, a former professor of history, stated that Bahrain's primary concern about Iraq is that events there are reflected in Bahrain due to the Bahraini Shia population's close observation of Iraq's transformation. He said that in 2003 Bahrain was not disappointed about Saddam Hussein's removal from power, but since then the U.S. has made mistakes that have contributed to Iraq's instability. The U.S. has not sufficiently understood the role of the tribes in Iraq, especially those along the border with Iran. In the past these tribes received financial support from Saddam to control security along the border. They now realize that the support to which they were accustomed is gone, and their loyalties may have shifted. He suggested the U.S. make an effort to bring the tribes into the political process.

4. (C) Dr. Khalid said a second major mistake was the dissolution of the Iraqi army, and that presently not enough is being done to build the new army. The perception among the Sunni is that the army and police will now be predominantly Shia. There need to be efforts to make it clear to all that the army has a diverse composition including people from all sects and areas. Many Sunnis view U.S. even-handedness in the political system as harming them and interpret the U.S. role as biased in favor of the Shia.

5. (C) Dr. Khalid went on to say that none of Iraq's neighbors want Iraq to be strong and united. Previously Turkey thought Iraqi Kurds were a threat to Turkey's domestic security, but now there is the possibility that the Kurds will look to Turkey as a guardian. Many think the Shia in the south are looking to Iran as the leader of the world's Shia. However, Iraqi Shia consider Karbala and Najaf to be the center of Shiism, not Qom in Iran. Dr. Khalid sees a potential religious battle between Iraqi and Iranian clerics for the loyalty of the Shia. The current advantage is in Iran's favor since it controls local militias and political leaders in the south.

... And from the view of a journalist

6. (C) Bashmi, also the managing editor of a new Arabic daily, Al Waqt, said that the U.S. opened a Pandora's box by invading Iraq, and that the sectarian problems in Iraq remind him of Europe in the Middle Ages. The Iraqi central government is not able to exert control over all areas of the

country. He said that Iran has been paying militias in the south for the past 20 years and characterized Iran's influence in Iraq as a bargaining chip it is using in dealing with the U.S. Bashmi questioned whether Iraq will be able to stay united, and expressed concern that the Kurds may make moves toward independence. He also suggested that the Iraqi central government could benefit from the Bahraini parliamentary model that includes an appointed Shura (advisory) Council to serve as a balance to and brake on the elected Council of Representatives.

Iran's role in the Gulf

17. (C) Bashmi presented a contrast in Iranian relations with individual GCC countries, saying that with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia those relations are strained, but with Oman and the United Arab Emirates relations are satisfactory. The GCC has not presented a unified policy on Iran. He questioned the West's resistance to Iran having nuclear weapons, pointing to India and Israel as both having nuclear weapons. Dr. Khalid responded that the issue is one of balance of power. Israel was justified 30 years ago in having nuclear weapons because they were under an existential threat from their Arab neighbors. India has always been balanced by Pakistan. If Iran develops nuclear weapons, there will be a need for a Sunni country, like Saudi Arabia, to develop nuclear weapons.

18. (C) Dr. Khalid explained that Iran has always seen itself as a superpower wanting to control the whole Gulf area, even though it did not always have a functioning navy. He said that at one time, Iran bought ships from India but did not use them, and in the end they were stolen by Arabs living up the coastline from Bandar Abbas. Notwithstanding its wealth of natural resources, Iran is not strong economically, its infrastructure is under-developed, and the living standard of the people is low. Bashmi offered that in order for there to be a unified front against Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict needs to be resolved. Terrorist groups feed from this conflict and distract regional governments from focusing on Iran.

Politics at home

19. (C) Bashmi explained that most Bahrainis want continued democratic progress, but that each person has a different concept of democracy. "We want people to view themselves as citizens of Bahrain, not as Shia and Sunni." He estimated that it may take eight more years to educate the public about what democracy is. Bashmi said that most political societies are leaning toward participating in the 2006 elections. However, there is a minority that wants to disrupt the process and maintain a level of instability. These people damage property, get arrested, and then claim they are political prisoners. (Note: This is a reference to the Haq Movement, which is behind many of the violent demonstrations in Bahrain over the past several months. End note.) Bahrain does not want its neighbors to shy away from democratic change because of demonstrations they see occurring in Bahrain.

110. (U) Counselor Zelikow cleared this cable.

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